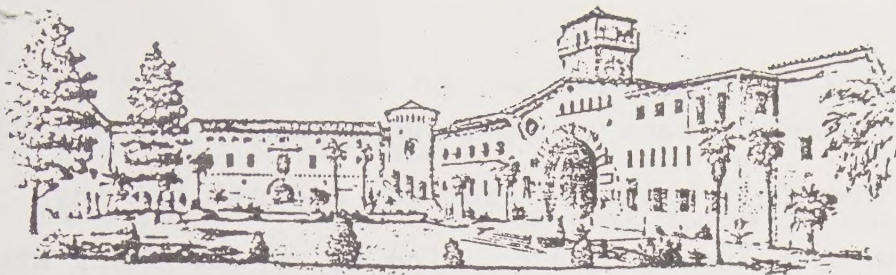


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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

Workshop Sponsored by the Santa Barbara
County Commission on the Status of Women
May 2, 1974

"Improving the Medical/Legal Treatment
of the Rape Victim in Santa Barbara County"
reported by Miriam Hawthorne

The Santa Barbara Commission on the Status of Women, desiring publicity and credibility as a change agent, planned and executed a rape workshop. Many opportunities for small group interaction were built into the workshop's agenda. The day's activities were designed to encourage participation by those working directly with rape victims and rapists as well as the general public, including feminists and rape victims. Co-sponsors included the Santa Barbara Community Relations Commission, the Santa Barbara Barristers Club and the Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center. The Board of Supervisors allocated \$350 so that participation was cost-free.

The situation for rape victims at the time of the conference, while far from perfect, was better in Santa Barbara County than in many other areas. Fortunately, law enforcement officials showed a fairly high level of empathy compared to the attitudes portrayed in research literature. Because our hospitals are small, rape victims have had more personal attention than they would have received in a huge crowded urban facility. The predominant

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

-Proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution.

complaint listed by rape victims who reported the assault was the isolation they felt while waiting for medical and legal attention. They also were traumatized by having to repeat their stories to law enforcement officials many times and were often left alone while waiting for interrogation.

The trial procedures of delving into a victim's irrelevant sexual history in an attempt to prove her propensity for consenting to sexual intercourse seems to have been the rule rather than the exception for those brave enough, or foolish enough, to go to trial.

The workshop started with an overview, including statistics and sociological profiles of rapists and their victims. Then representative reports were given, telling how various institutions handled their part of the problem.

Small groups, composed of an experienced facilitator, medical and law enforcement personnel, and a woman knowledgeable about rape convened to work on the best possible treatment of rape victims. It was gratifying to see anti-establishment women, who have alternative life styles, face to face with policemen, in a cooperative working spirit. The groups reached consensus on "ideal treatment of rape victims". They started at the report of the crime, progressed through medical treatment, legal interrogation, prosecution and conviction of the rapist. They particularly recommended long term counseling for rape victims and those close to them as well as for the rapist. There was a surprising lack of vindictiveness on the part of the women participating. They

expressed concern that rapists not be punished, but that they be counseled to prevent recidivism.

Guest speakers from a Los Angeles task force on rape reported on their activities at lunch. In the afternoon, new groups were formed composed of those in medicine, those in law enforcement and those involved in counseling. These groups were encouraged to synthesize consistent policies. They were to take good ideas from each other and follow, so far as possible, the ideals formulated by the morning groups. Special notice was taken of the need for someone to stay with the victim to prevent her feeling of isolation.

Spirited sharing followed. Participants left the workshop with a sense of satisfaction and encouragement from each other. Nearby communities are using similar formats to attack the problem of rape in their areas.

As a result of the conference and its attendant publicity, a very effective Rape Crisis Center was organized. The volunteers were highly motivated and continue to work tirelessly. Many of them are motivated as a result of being raped themselves. Other volunteers are law enforcement officers and dedicated feminists. They are working to educate the public about the problems surrounding rape. Films are shown to warn women about the dangers involved with hitchhiking. Self defense courses are being taught. Inservice programs are presented for nurses and doctors. Police and sheriff's department employees are being sensitized to the needs of women.

Most of those exposed to the needs of rape victims have been eager to improve their techniques. Inservice programs continue. There are many misconceptions to be corrected however, and misunderstanding often leads to insensitive treatment.

Rape does seem to be a subject whose time has come.

In retrospect, the format of the workshop seemed to be very effective for learning in a non-threatening atmosphere. Representatives of each institution were urged to report their current policies and procedures. This was incentive to examine their practices ahead of time. Lack of formal policy was corrected before embarrassment occurred. Some reported improving their policies as a result of the pre-conference scrutiny.

Results of the efforts of participants and planners were both immediate and long range. State laws enacted subsequently have humanized the treatment of rape victims. A woman's irrelevant personal history may no longer be used in court to humiliate and discredit her.

For a more detailed report, please see the comprehensive document prepared by the Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center, 221 W. Carrillo Street, Santa Barbara, California 93101.

